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IRA Resolution: Buyer Be Wary

Gregg Kurek is a member of the International Reading Association Board of Directors, past president of the Michigan Reading Association, and chair of the MRA Ethics Committee. He is retired from Bridgeman Public Schools in Bridgeman, Michigan.

During the past year, the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association felt compelled to revisit the Buyer Be Wary resolution approved originally in 1965 and reaffirmed by Delegates Assembly in 1992. The Board wanted to ensure that wording of this resolution reflected its position on current issues and trends in the marketing of materials and services used to deliver reading instruction.

The Board wanted to emphatically reemphasize that the teaching of reading is complex and requires knowledgeable teachers, not merely a set of materials purporting to effect student learning at all levels from early childhood through adult. Additionally, since issues regarding marketing of materials and services have changed since 1992, the Board wanted to clearly re-state its position.

Since IRA maintains that there is no single program, professional service, or instructional service that has been proven successful in teaching all students to read, the Board wanted to caution consumers regarding products or services that claim success for all learners. Additionally, this revised resolution charges consumers to evaluate studies of effectiveness ensuring that publishers or distributors have described the students for whom the materials were successful and under what conditions they were used.

The revised Buyer Be Wary resolution was presented at the 2002 Delegates Assembly in San Francisco where it received verbal acclaim and was approved by the delegates. It is hoped this resolution will aid teachers, parents, and policymakers as they consider programs, professional services, or instructional materials for use in the teaching of reading.

Buyer Be Wary

Literacy is a global priority. Learning to read is a complex activity that requires knowledgeable teachers who are responsive to learners' needs. Currently, however, a wide variety of services, methods, and materials, which claim to produce the improvement of reading skills from early childhood through adulthood, are being offered to the general public, teachers, and parents.

In some instances, the advertising accompanying these materials approaches sensationalism, exaggeration, and misrepresentation. Based on current scientific evidence, the International Reading Association maintains that there is no single program, professional service, or instructional material that has been proven to be successful in teaching all learners to read.

To aid teachers, parents, and policymakers in the selection of materials for the instruction of reading, the International Reading Association offers the following recommendations and cautions:

- It is unethical for reading professionals and publishers or manufacturers of materials or devices to claim or guarantee success for all learners. Individuals who seek to purchase reading programs and materials should examine evidence of instructional success in guiding their purchase decision or product selection.
- The adoption, purchase, or recommendation for instructional services, methods, and materials should be based on publicly available studies of effectiveness. Purchasers of reading

improvement programs should ask for results of unbiased and independent evaluations.

- The research and evaluation information provided by the publisher or distributor should describe the students for whom the materials have been successful and the conditions under which they were implemented; some materials might be successful with some learners, but not for others.

Literacy learners around the world need and deserve reading instruction that is guided by sound policy, excellent teaching, and appropriate materials—not false promises.

Buyer Be Wary revision, 2002. Buyer Be Wary resolution was approved originally in 1965 and reaffirmed by the Delegates Assembly in 1992.

The Michigan Reading Association shall comply with all federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and with all requirements and regulations of the state of Michigan. It is the policy of the Michigan Reading Association that no candidate or applicant for a position or office in this organization shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, creed or ancestry, age sex, marital status, or disability, be discriminated against, excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination in any program or activity for which the Michigan Reading Association is responsible.

The president of the Michigan Reading Association, together with the Executive Committee, shall ensure that federal and state regulations are complied with and that any complaints are dealt with promptly in accordance with the law.